

FAIRNESS COMMISSION

6.00pm 20 JANUARY 2016

WHITEHAWK LIBRARY

NOTES OF MEETING



Present: Commissioners: Vic Rayner (Chair), Wednesday Croft (Youth Mayor), Martin Harris (Managing Director, Brighton & Hove Bus and Coach Company), Ann Hickey (General Manager, East Sussex Credit Union), Dr. Rhidian Hughes (CEO, Voluntary Organisations Disability Group), Imran Hussain (Director of Policy, Rights & Advocacy, Child Poverty Action Group), Sally Polanski (Chief Executive, Brighton & Hove Community Works), Bill Randall (Writer, Journalist and Housing Consultant), Dan Shelley (Vice Principal, Sussex Coast College Hastings), Dr. Katie Stead (GP and Clinical Lead for Public Health and for Locally Commissioned Services and Quality for Primary Care), Rachel Verdin (Organiser, GMB) and David Wolff (Director, Community University Partnership Programme).

Present: Councillor Rayner (Chair)

Also in attendance: Commissioners

Welcome to Whitehawk Library

Chris El Shabba, Trustee and Chair of Due East Neighbourhood Council welcomed the Commission to Whitehawk Library and gave a brief overview of the work of Due East which had gained registered charitable status in 2014.

1 INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIR

- 1.1 The Commission received an introduction from the Chair who provided an overview of the work of the Fairness Commission. This meeting would focus on employment and skills.

2 OVERVIEW OF THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND THE EMPLOYER'S PERSPECTIVE

- 2.1 The Commission received a presentation from Sarah Springford, Director, Brighton Chamber of Commerce and Gavin Stewart, Executive Director, Brighton & Hove Economic Partnership in relation to the business community and the employer's perspective.

- 2.2 Gavin Stewart made the following points:

- It was important to look at the global, national and local perspective.
- There were encouraging signs in the local economy but it was noted that 21% of the local employment base was the public sector and that £68,000,000 of savings needed to be found by local authorities in the next 4 years. This would have a huge impact.
- Types of employment important to the city included financial services, tourism, digital and creative industries, environmental industries, the health sector and retail and leisure sector.
- The City Plan asked for 24,000 new homes to be built by 2016 and 112,000 square metre of workspace by 2016. This would be difficult to achieve.
- The city was highly educated but there was a skills gap. Higher value jobs were needed.
- The city was below average in pupils obtaining 5 good GCSEs.
- The large numbers of commuters in and out of the city was creating a huge pressure on the transport system.
- Pay in the city was below national and south east average. There was a need to work with regional partners in future.
- There was a need to build greater connectivity between public, private and third sector employers in the city.

- 2.3 Sarah Springfield made the following points:

- The Brighton & Hove Living Wage Campaign had been run by Brighton & Hove Chamber of Commerce for the last 4 years. Local businesses were being encouraged to join the campaign. It was the only business led living wage campaign in the country.
- The campaign had just signed up its 250th business. 5 new members had been signed up on 20th January.
- 2,795 salaries had been raised as a result of the campaign.
- Digital businesses and third sector charities found it easier to sign up to the campaign. It was more difficult for tourism and the retail and service industries.
- Most recently surveyed businesses had felt a positive impact.
- 41% of businesses have said they would not pay to be accredited to a national campaign.

- Brighton Chamber of Commerce would like to sign up more businesses and extend the campaign.
- Brighton Chamber of Commerce is a not for profit company and is not part of the local authority or government funded.
- It is important to think about how local businesses could be encouraged to grow, thrive and be supported.

2.4 In response to questions and in general discussion the following points were made:

- Overall family incomes had taken a big hit.
- In answer to questions relating to parental employment and to what extent children were an important issue for business; and how Universal Credit may affect businesses, it was explained that issues like pensions and Universal Credit were not being discussed at present by smaller businesses. It was a hand to mouth existence for many businesses in the city. Smaller businesses were not able to get involved in childcare.
- Smaller businesses could be quite flexible but needed to be well managed and required resources.
- In answer to a question on how the Chamber of Commerce could push ahead with the Brighton & Hove Living Wage Campaign and ensure people earned enough to live and work in the city, it was explained that the campaign was trying to point out the benefits of a living wage, however there were limited resources to carry out this work. There was a desire to carry on running the campaign and sign up bigger companies. One idea was to make the living wage a contractual requirement in the procurement process.
- Questions were asked about encouraging small businesses to grow; getting people on JSA back into work; and Greater Brighton devolution.
- Small companies needed to be supported. Devolution would encourage growth hubs. Work needed to be carried out with companies to change options regarding employing people who had been out of work for some time.
- People needed to be helped to become 'work ready'.
- The process of greater Brighton devolution had commenced and the issue would become more important
- There were large numbers of small businesses in the city and many would not follow the traditional route of growing into a huge team.
- A great deal of work had been carried out on apprentices and Brighton & Hove Chamber of Commerce had started to work with City College on this issue.

2.5 The Commission thanked Ms Springfield and Mr Stewart for their presentations and response to questions.

3 DESIGNING JOBS FOR FLEXIBLE WORKING AND SUPPORTING PROGRESSION

3.1 The Commission received a presentation from Sally Brett, Senior Policy Officer, TUC and Co-Chair of Working Families in relation to flexible working.

3.2 The following points were made:

- Flexible Working is paid work that allows some variation in hours, location and the way work is carried out to accommodate situations such as caring commitments. It should not be employer imposed flexibility such as zero hours contracts that fail to consider the needs of a family or personal life.
- The right to request flexible working was introduced in 2003 and is now open to all employees with six month's service.
- Research shows that there is a great unmet demand for flexible working; however, there are a number of people who want flexible working but feel uncomfortable about raising this request with employers. Employees fear negative consequences of flexible working such as lack of career progression.
- Employers need to look at job design and workload.
- Part timers are often stuck in low paid positions. Good quality jobs are still mainly full time.
- Timewise/Joseph Rowntree Foundation had produced a report on the lack of flexible hiring.
- A lot of people particularly lone parents are shut out of the job market and nearly half of the women in part time jobs are over qualified for the job they are doing.
- There is a need to improve the supply of flexible jobs by better matching skills to vacancies. There needs to be improved opportunities for women, parents, carers, disabled people and older people.
- There is a need to open up jobs currently being blocked by those stuck in part time work for which they are over qualified.
- There is a need to promote Happy to Talk flexible working recruitment strapline and logo.
- There is a need to work with organisations like Working Families and Timewise to change the culture and support managers, with job design and managing flexible working and to build a progression pathway for part time flexible workers.
- Commissioning and local enterprise partnerships are being used to promote flexible working. There is a need to ensure there is support for job seekers and that employers are considering flexible working and hiring opportunities.

3.3 In response to questions and in general discussion the following points were made:

- It was suggested that flexible working could be promoted amongst living wage companies.
- Benefits could be affected by people asking for part time work.
- Flexible working was not well publicised and often sanctioned.
- There is a perception that flexible working leads to less attractive parts of job being distributed to the rest of the workforce. This needed to be addressed through dialogue with the workforce.
- Work was being carried out with the Scottish Government which was helping to identify case studies.
- Some people had responsibility for elderly parents. The TUC had carried out research on older women with caring responsibilities. There was a need to address that issue especially as the pension age was increasing.

3.4 The Commission thanked Ms Brett for her presentation and response to questions.

4 HOW BEST TO SUPPORT ENTRY TO THE JOB MARKET AND PROGRESSION TO WORK

4.1 The Commission received a presentation from Kirsten Trussell, Skills Development Manager, Coast2Capital Local Enterprise Partnership in relation to supporting entry to the job market and progression into work.

4.2 The following points were made:

- This is a broad subject area often focussed on young people; however there was a focus on older people in the presentation.
- Coast2Capital is a voluntary partnership which determined local priorities. It covers 39 local enterprise companies.
- There are low average earnings in the region and talented residents are lost to London. Technical skills are needed and there is an ageing workforce.
- Priorities included higher level skills, STEM technical and professional skills, strong leadership and management, apprenticeship growth, maths, English and basic skills and the re-skilling of the older workforce.
- The number of over 50's was rising; however on average men and women still leave the labour market earlier now than in the 1950s.
- Leaving the market early has a significant impact for the economy, for businesses and for individuals.
- There is a cost to employers to losing older employees early. It is important for older workers to share knowledge with younger workers.

4.3 In response to questions and in general discussion the following points were made:

- The Bridge Community, a part of the Local Enterprise Partnership worked holistically around a person to provide support and advice. The subject in question would fit their remit.
- Inter-generational conversations are a social responsibility for communities and families.
- The Local Enterprise Partnership could send a message out about this issue.
- The Teach Too programme allowed older workers to obtain training to pass on their skills and knowledge.

4.4 The Commission thanked Ms Trussell for her presentation and response to questions.

5 OPEN SESSION

5.1 The Chair invited statements, comments and questions from the public gallery and the following points were made:

- Is there a scheme to protect people who are earning less than the living wage actually contributing to paying a living wage to other people in better paid organisations?
- What effect would an EU no vote have on the economy?
- One of the big barriers for people who are not currently working who are of working age is the stigma and problem of mental health in terms of fluctuating conditions. How would

the Fairness Commission respond to that issue in order to tackle stigma and help people with mental health problems get back into the workplace. The Chair responded by stating that this timely issue would be covered by the next speaker.

- How is the living wage affected by the top up on earnings. Imran Hussain replied that if a person's wage goes up it would affect top up credits.

5.2 The chair thanked the people who had made contributions and stated that not all the statements/questions could receive an immediate response.

6 EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT: LESSONS FROM SOUTHDOWN HOUSING

6.1 The Commission received a presentation from Neil Blanchard, Chief Executive, Southdown Housing in relation to lessons from Southdown Housing with regard to employment support.

6.2 The following points were made:

- Southdown Housing supported 2,500 people in Brighton & Hove working across housing, health, care and employment.
- Southdown's employment support helped people such as carers and people with mental health problems and physical disabilities back into work. People with mental health problems are twice as likely to gain employment when supported by the Southdown model of support.
- Benefits of work included financial inclusion, social inclusion, social capital, friends/relationships and providing a focus in people's lives. The right work was good for people's health and supported recovery.
- Barriers and myths included low expectations and aspirations, lack of confidence and self belief, the wrong skills and work experiences for the local job market, gaps in work history, and stigma and discrimination.
- Southdown is working with companies such as Virgin Atlantic, American Express, and ASDA on mental health work place training.
- By targeting and addressing unemployment & economic inactivity Southdown aim to enhance local awareness and opportunities, decrease multi generational unemployment and contribute to a stronger economy.

6.3 In response to questions and in general discussion the following points were made:

- Southdown is commissioned to work in a secondary health team. Staff work with 50 people each year and there are programmes for people with severe mental health problems.
- There are issues with Fit notes issued by GPs and Southdown staff can have discussion with HR staff regarding this matter.
- Southdown has a specialist benefits advisor.
- There is an Early Intervention Service for Young People with a specialist worker.
- In response to a question about whether there was scope to devolve the work programme to the local authority, it was explained that Southdown is a small local provider. There is scope for larger organisations to run larger programmes.

- In response to a question asking if Southdown had any thoughts on the redesign of the Wellbeing Service which was being re-commissioned, it was explained that it was currently difficult to navigate the system when people were off sick from work. This model could be done differently. Early intervention was required.
- There are a number of statistics about sustainability. These are checked at 6 months and 18 months.

6.4 The Chair thanked Mr Blanchard for his presentation and response to questions.

7 INITIAL FINDINGS FROM THE CONSULTATION FOR THE REFRESH OF THE CITY EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS PLAN

7.1 The Commission received a presentation from Richard Scothorne & Caroline Masundre, Rocket Science with regard to consultation findings for the refresh of the City Employment & Skills Plan.

7.2 The following points were made:

- There are three priorities which are ensuring no-one is left behind or disadvantaged in the labour market; Learn to Earn – equally important to adults and young people; Benefits from growth; and Replacement demand.
- Brighton & Hove has lower employment compared to other areas with the greatest impact on ethnic minorities and young females.
- Job seekers allowance is reducing and in line with the national average although the reduction was less for the over 50s.
- Employment Support Allowance is in line with national averages although 13,000 residents is high. Over 50's and mental health priority Work Related Activity Group is 1500.
- There are challenges in apprenticeship take up which is lower than other areas.
- Average pay has remained steady but costs are rising. The benefit cap will have an impact.
- Key issues include the lack of career guidance/employment support; jobs being blocked by graduates; issues about duplication by providers and agencies.
- The Apprenticeship Levy is a major structural change.
- The new Work and Health Programme will combine work programme and work choice.
- There is a universal need for employers to be actively engaged and supported across all age groups and circumstances.
- An Employer Pledge is a start but to be successful it needs to have wider focus to be part of a more strategic relationship. It needs to be trusted, credible and not subject to short term funding.
- Coherent managed services are required that moved from fragmentation to a single offer, point of access for the individual; a case management approach; and actively managed to enhance performance.
- Factors for success include focusing on what can be controlled and influenced; a clear and consistent message that everyone buys into; corrals the resources and

energies of agencies and providers and gains momentum and scale to have the greatest impact.

- Focus for fairness includes supporting the vulnerable through transitions into employment – travel, rent, living costs; a city wide action plan looking at pay progression and support for those on low incomes beyond Universal Credit; and commitment to co-ordinated services around the person.

7.3 In response to questions and in general discussion the following points were made:

- The importance of partnership working and co-ordinating work was raised.
- A question was raised on how trust could be engendered between job seekers and staff in the Job Centre.
- It was stressed that the vast majority who are benefit capped are lone parents with young children.
- A question was asked about gaps in support for employment and whether there was a role for volunteers.
- It was stressed that nothing happened without clear leadership. It was about making existing resources work well.
- Support for helping people gaining employment included help with travel costs and access to the internet.
- Benefit groups were converging and there was a need for high quality assessment in the round.
- Training for front line staff was necessary to ensure they were sharing a training programme.
- Volunteering was an important route to work which built skills and confidence.

7.4 The Commission thanked Mr Scothorne & Ms Masundre, for their presentation and response to questions

8 OPEN SESSION

8.1 The Chair invited comments and questions from the public gallery and the following points were made:

- The questioner was aware that the council had once operated a team called Admin All Areas which employed people on a bank staff arrangement so that any department could receive help if needed. Could there be collaboration so that Admin All Areas is extended to all public sector bodies in the city.
- The public sector is competing with the private sector for the most talented people between the ages of 22 to 45. It was suggested that the public sector take on young people to get started in work and help them eventually to get a job in the private sector. They could later come back to the public sector when they were over 45 and be a valuable resource because of the increased pension age.
- Concern was expressed about limited access to the computer suite at the DWP. This was leading to people going into sanctions because they could not gain access. There was a big skills gap in using computers.

9 CHAIR'S CLOSING REMARKS

9.1 The Chair gave a summary of the meeting and the main points made by the speakers and issues raised in the discussion and made the following points:

- The Commission heard that smaller and medium sized enterprises were not thinking about the impact of changes such as Universal Credit and work place pensions. Commissioners could think about focusing some of their recommendations to support employers.
- There was encouraging news about the take up of the Living Wage but it was noted that there were key absences from the Living Wage Campaign.
- More could be done to encourage people with caring responsibilities for example by enabling flexible working arrangements.
- There were key challenges with regard to the ageing population and encouraging older people to stay in the workforce.

9.2 The Chair thanked the Commission, speakers and other attendees and closed the meeting.

The meeting concluded at 9.05pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of